Fishing holidays

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FISHING HOLIDAYS

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

JOHN MAXWELL'S MARRIAGE.

THE OLD KNOWLEDGE.

THE REPENTANCE OF A PRIVATE SECRETARY.

HIGHWAYS AND BYWAYS IN DONEGAL AND ANTRIM.

TO-DAY AND TO-MORROW IN IRELAND.

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A LAY OF OSSIAN AND PATRICK.

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FISHING HOLIDAYS

BY

STEPHEN GWYNN

London
MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
NEW YORK : THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
1904

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Of the papers contained in this volume four have appeared in magazines: 'St. Brigid's Flood' and 'With the Pilchard Fleet' in *Blackwood's*, 'The Young Fisher' and part of the essay entitled 'Amabilis Insania' in the *Cornhill*; the earlier pages and the title of the essay come from the *Pilot*. The author's best acknowledgments are due to the editors of these periodicals.

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PREFACE

When one of these papers appeared in a magazine a friendly reviewer took occasion to complain that it contained nothing particularly instructive. He was perfectly right; and I am afraid that this whole book will lie open to the same censure. It is as well, therefore, to state frankly at the outset that its object is not instruction, but amusement. If any one can derive profit from the record of stupid mistakes which the author himself has made, he will find plenty of them conscientiously set down. But of positive precepts there are mighty few which an occasional angler can give with advantage. Such as occur to me shall be put here, in the forefront of the volume.

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My experience extends not far beyond the small rivers and lakes in Donegal, and it extends only to others of the same type in Kerry and Connaught; it is concerned also mainly with the summer fishing. For this fishing my chosen equipment would be always two rods—one from ten to twelve feet, stout enough to manage a five-pound fish without apprehensions of a smash, and furnished with a reel containing not less than sixty yards of light line. The salmon-rod should be of fourteen feet, but the running line tolerably heavy, for the sake of extra power in casting on a windy day. These are the essentials. It is well also to have a big rod, sixteen or eighteen feet as one chooses, for the few stretches of water which call for long casting, and a very light trout-rod for the lakes where neither grilse nor white trout are likely to be met.

In Donegal spinning tackle is very little used, and when used is seldom successful.

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The less it is used, the better for the fishing, by consent of all experts known to me.

About flies, a word of guidance can perhaps be usefully given. For the very first of flood-fishing a No. 2 (Limerick) hook may be desirable; but even in high water I should prefer a No. 4 or No. 5, and one day last summer I hooked two grilse on a No. 7 hook in a pool where other men were still using the worm; they had previously refused a larger fly.

The fly in question was a claret, tied by Mr. T. Courtney of Killarney, one of the three patterns which, speaking for myself, I think indispensable. The second is the hare's-ear, and this fly, although so well known, is very hard to come by in shops. It should be tied on a No. 7 or No. 8 hook, being chiefly of use in low water, and should be bushy and striped with gold tinsel. In a very high flood a fly of the same type, but with a reddish tinge through the hare's-ear,

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is deadly for white trout; for salmon I have done best with a sort of fiery brown or "crotal" colour. A good variant of the plain hare's-ear is a very small lemon-grey, or hare's-ear with a golden-olive hackle. This fly can be got good from Mr. M. Kelly of O'Connell Street in Dublin; and he also supplies an excellent type of the "blue-bottle"—a common Irish trout-fly, with body of *dark* blue silk, silver tinsel, black hackle, and dark wing. Any one going to fish in Donegal after June begins should have plenty of this pattern in the three sizes—lake trout, ordinary trout size, and small. It is no use in flood-water, but once the flood is clean gone I know nothing to touch it for white trout; and the lake-trout size has often killed grilse for me when they would stir to nothing else.

The big coarse flies for flood-water are nearly always to be got better from some local artist than from the shops. The average

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man on the spot, however, nearly always advises the stranger to fish with flies bigger than are to be desired. Opinion in Ireland is conservative, and does not recognise the spread of education among fish. My own view is that on free waters or hotel waters, except when a flood is on, you can hardly fish too small or too fine.

The place-names in this book will, for the most part, not be found in any map, or, if found, not as applied to the places which I describe.

For a last word, I am permitted to assure anglers that Izaak Walton's bag, concerning which the last of these essays is written, though it remains for the present in private ownership, will ultimately be reposited in some public treasury.

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I

AMABILIS INSANIA

I

If there were a copy of Francis Bacon's works attainable—but fortunately in the west of Donegal such appliances of culture are far to seek—it would be interesting to see under which of his heads should be ranked the piscatory illusion. Not one of those I can recall seems to fit, and yet it is a well-marked type of insanity which, curiously enough, infests especially the more civilised stages of humanity. Uncivilised man is content to get his fish out of water in the roughest and readiest way—with a net, with a basket, with a pitchfork, even, as is seen in the conduct of that permanent barbarian, the human boy, with his fingers. Advanced humanity, like the lady in the

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poem, "has at will more quaint and subtle ways to kill" (but ways less effectual); it hedges about the procedure with an etiquette of restrictions, as, for example, when it forbids us to awaken the instinct of cannibalism in a salmon by offering to him (or her) the roe of his (or her) proper species. It is only under these conditions and restrictions that civilised man considers fishing a recreation, and under them he addicts himself to it with a sort of gentle frenzy. The French have passed it into a proverb, and indicate amiable idiotcy by saying that a man is *capable de pêcher à la ligne*. And indeed, when one considers the scores of placid anglers who line the banks of Seine and Loire and a hundred other rivers, peaceably waiting upon Providence and the bobbing of a float, while the imperishable hope, defiant of all probability, flickers in their bosoms, it should seem that the French, as usual, are right.

But of all kinds of fishing, and of all kinds of fishing madness, none is a tenth part so demented as the madness of salmon-fishing. Conceive the case of a cook set down to beguile an epicure with delicacies

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that bore no distant resemblance to anything that the epicure was in the habit of eating. Conceive the attempt to induce appetite in an elderly *viveur* with a display of arsenical-green sugar-plums or crimson bull's-eyes. The task would be difficult, even for an experienced artist. But to this must be added another supposition. The epicure's digestive organs must be in such a state as absolutely to preclude the idea of digesting whatever he might choose to swallow, however attractive the dish. And not only that. The epicure must also be conceived of as aware, whether from the witness of his own eyes or the inherited experience of his race, that the attempt to swallow green lollipops or crimson sweets served up in a certain very peculiar fashion is accompanied with a sharp pang in the jaw and, possibly, with a brief and violent struggle ending in the epicure's total disappearance from the world he lived in. In short, as the race's experience would probably put it, any one who touches those sweets is liable to be captured and carried off by devils with forks. With these conditions stated, it is probable that the most confident cook would

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at once renounce the endeavour. And yet what the cook would stick at, the salmon-fisher solemnly and steadily attempts. That is why he is such a fool.

The salmon, to begin with, is a creature that in fresh water has for practical purposes no stomach. For that reason the natural and reasonable way to take salmon in fresh water is to net them, gaff them, shoot them, drive them into a corner and ladle them out; anything rather than offer a bait to a fish with its stomach atrophied and shrivelled like a deflated football. To go on with, the bait offered to the salmon is, as a rule, entirely unlike anything that he is in the habit of eating in the periods when he certainly must eat consumedly. The appeal is solely to his curiosity, and this is fully recognised in the theory of angling. With trout, who are naturally disposed to rise at flies for business purposes, your scientific angler fishes up stream. His object is two-fold: first, to avoid being seen by the fish (which, of course, is facing up stream too), and secondly, to give the fish the least time possible to scrutinise the lure. The acme of trout-fishing is to bring the fly silently,

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suddenly, and directly over the nose of a trout on the look-out for food. In fishing for salmon the whole case is reversed. You fish across and down the stream, dragging the fly with spasmodic jerks through the water, in a way quite unlike the movement of any floating object; and if you know where your fish is, you make it a point to give him plenty of time to see the fly coming. If he takes it, he takes it out of curiosity, much as a child chases and catches a butterfly. If he had a hand, no doubt he would often handle it merely, but, like the child, he desires to taste the unfamiliar, and that is his doom. Again, in any ordinary river, the appeal to curiosity is interfered with by the fact that day after day, year after year, the same appeal has been made in more or less the same way, and many salmon must have seen with their own eyes, whether as fry or grown fish, the awful consequences that befall those who are captivated. Yet so strong is curiosity, so inveterate is the habit of eating, that salmon will risk not only a certain indigestion—for the salmon who swallows anything in fresh water must suffer the worst torments of

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dyspepsia—but also terrible martyrdom ending in apotheosis by the medium of the gaff. Accordingly, the fact is undoubted that salmon will take the fly upon occasion, and even under certain very rare combinations of circumstance will rise as freely as hungry trout. Perhaps it has all been arranged by the higher powers in order to perpetuate a delusion which hurts no man and very few salmon, and is upon the whole a most amiable insanity.

These reflections naturally arise from a week's fishing. The bitter experience of two summers in which I, a Londoner with little choice of seasons, had flogged much water ineffectually, always in the wrong week, left me all but resolute never again to touch a salmon rod, but to confine myself to the pursuit of trout, who were at least creatures with a healthy appetite that must be gratified some time in the twenty-four hours. But there was the river in flood, and though accounts were not encouraging, still it was Monday, and on the Saturday a fish had been killed. A relapse was all but inevitable; I fished, and before lunch-time a grilse was on the bank. After that,

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reasoning went by the board, and for the whole afternoon one fished with the active expectation of a rise in every pool; a few white trout were sufficient to entertain the illusion. Next day was a long day's thrashing across wind, as tiring exercise as can be found for men out of practice, and by the evening, when I returned with a couple of inconsiderable trout, the bloom was off the sport. Still, my companion on the river had got a good fish, and I had had my chance, for there was a salmon that straightened the line. On Wednesday the river was not swelling visibly, like the shepherd in *Pickwick*, but rather dwindling before my very eyes; a second time I came back empty-handed, and was ready to depart. Then happened one of those things which are to the salmon-fisher what upon certain days the fly is to the salmon—causes of a total suspension of judgment. It rained all Thursday steadily, and on Friday morning the flood was roaring full at breakfast-time. Opinion was divided whether at ten the river was fishable or not, and in the first pool and the second nothing stirred. Then came a long swift run ending in a deep

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round hole where the river turned a corner, and as I went up the bank I saw a fish roll in the run. The moment my fly was over him he came, the line straightened, and then fell slack. Only a salmon-fisher knows what the feeling is; and I was convinced that luck had departed for ever. Still, one went on. Twenty yards lower in the same run, and not five casts later, a fish took the fly as it was lifted from the water; ran, leaped, and then headed in under the bank that was undercut by the current. Before he could be coaxed out, he also was off. This is a public confession of incompetence, for better fishing should certainly have secured one, if not both, of those fish; and if there is a more disagreeable sensation to begin a wet day on than a sense of incompetence, it is not known to me, especially when the gillie shares it. There were still twenty yards of the run unfished, and I fished them resignedly. Just where the run entered the turning hole a third fish rose—the third in ten minutes. Whether it was he that came back or another I cannot say, but after the due interval I fished for him, and then came another rise a few

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yards off the spot, then another, and this time we got him. I had hooked three salmon and had five rises within a quarter of an hour and fifty yards of water. The pool was by no means fished out, but I was asked to go higher up as a lady was anxious to stay on the nearer stretch of water, so I moved up stream to a fine open throw with a run at the head of it. Waiting for a cloud, I put my flies over the stream, and was promptly into a sporting fish of about six pounds, which fought far harder than the other larger one. It was then half-past eleven; the fishing had lasted about an hour, and I had two fish on the bank. If a telegram had come summoning me for any earthly consideration, it would hardly have been obeyed. Last year a man had caught eight fish one day in that river; there was no reason apparent why one should not get ten, as had been done the year before, or even twelve; or why not pass the score, as an angler had passed it on another very similar stream in the north of the county. However, when the next two pools yielded nothing, though fish were on the move, matters looked different, and the

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upshot was that after twelve o'clock that day neither of the two rods on the river touched a fish. Yet the conditions were to all appearance unchanged, the water especially being, if anything, more like the ideal thing as time went on.

Still, the fact remains that within little more than an hour I had hooked four salmon; and I am now irrecoverably relapsed into the delusion that salmon-fishing is a reasonable pastime. Another time they may come and there may be no disasters; and yet another time and the rise may last all day instead of a bare two hours. With what days of monotonous thrashing over water this error will be expiated every salmon-fisher knows—days which might be pleasantly spent with a light trout rod, catching perhaps a dozen, perhaps two or three dozen, of the nice brown trout that swarm in every lough and stream in Ireland. But in my heart I know that the case is hopeless, and to the end of my days the memory of that hot corner on the Glen River will nourish the inextinguishable hope, all the more surely because I did not on that occasion fully profit by my good fortune.

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II

It is fairly conceded, then, that while every angler has a craze, the writer of these pages and every other salmon-fisher is seriously demented. *Quem Deus vult perdere*—we all know the proverb. And yet, if Providence wished to make a happy man, what better gift could be laid in the cradle than a quiet-going hobby? Ask Mr. Shandy; recall the case of my Uncle Toby. It is a poor spirit that will not justify its own pleasures, and one may try to prove that even the fisherman is not such a fool as he looks.

Let me not, however, pretend to pluck the heart out of the angler's mystery. And in truth none of us, I think, could divulge it if we would. As in most mysteries, the initiated know the rites, the adepts more fully than the novices; but they only know in reality what they do; what makes them do it, is at best a conjecture. Was there ever a fisherman, I wonder, who has not asked himself time and again what ever brought him into such a preposterous pursuit?

Leaving, then, to Dr. Max Nordau, Professor Lombroso, or some such specialist, to

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dissect and determine the psychology of the angler, I pursue my own much less ambitious purpose—which is, merely to set down the things that rise up in my mind when I ask myself why it is that, year after year, my notion of the perfect holiday, and I would almost say the perfect pleasure, associates itself more and more with fishing.

When Mrs. Battle spoke of the virtues of a square game "*she meant whist*"; and so fishing, in my inner consciousness, always means fishing with a fly. But the man who would limit his sympathies to any single branch of the pursuit is scarce worthy to be called an angler; his heart should go out to the taking of fish by any creditable method —and even that qualifying clause should receive a liberal construction. Poisoning rivers with spurge is abhorrent to every decent mind. Killing fish in a pool with dynamite is little better, though, in a whisper, one may own a wish to see it done, just once. But spearing salmon by torchlight, although reprehensible in itself —especially if the fish are spawning—is a sport that must rank with the finest, and not many of us can read the chapter in

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Guy Mannering which describes it, without regretting the days when such things could be done unblushingly, even by sheriffs. And net-fishing of all kinds has a fascination purely its own. There are not many better moments than those when you fetch a trawl in over the boat-side, and the catch comes partly into view, before the joy begins of disentangling it from the lumps of kelp, stones, and other rubbish, animal and vegetable.

A great part of the charm of fishing consists surely in the strangeness of the element we work in. It is as if you threw your line or net into another world, and brought thence by subtlety its remote denizens. One may fetch a bird down out of the sky, but the quarry is, after all, a kindly creature of the earth as much as deer or rabbit; it lives on the same plane as we do; blood is warm in its veins. Taking the life of fish is not the same thing; there is less hint of killing about it. This may sound unreasonable, but any sportsman knows that if each head of game had to be killed by hand after the gun had done its work there would be fewer enthusiasts for shooting. As it is, we know that it is possible to drop

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hare or pheasant clean dead, and we hope to do it. But, though every trout and salmon has to be knocked on the head, yet few of us feel repugnance to doing so; while the least squeamish dislike the necessity of giving the *coup de grâce* to a rabbit.

One reason, of course, for such lack of fellow-feeling is the silence of these aliens. A caught hare can wring our heart with its crying; but the fish suffer, if they do suffer, dumbly. *O mutis quoque piscibus*——. If Melpomene could indeed have given utterance to fishes, she did very well to abstain. She may perhaps rain influence among them; may inspire threnodies for the aged trout who at last succumbs to a minnow, or pæans of victory over the spring fish that with one wild rush and leap has burst the confining tackle. But at least, if such emotions there are, Melpomene secludes from us the expression of them. And the fish that escapes gets clean away; it seems clear that even a hook in his jaw is only a temporary inconvenience, perhaps a glorious decoration, like the German student's slit and plastered nose. One need not be haunted by the thought of wounded creatures that creep into some

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corner to die; and my only moments of remorse have been when some unlucky little pinkeen of a trout or salmon fry has swallowed the hook (never meant for him) so deep that in dislodging it I have injured the creature badly, and seen it turn tragically belly upwards when it reached what should have been the safety of the water. But that remorse would never have touched me had I discerned him past recovery, and pitched him into the basket to bestow on some small urchin met by the wayside.

It is a fine question, and one that goes deep into the metaphysics of angling, whether it is better to fish for the seen or the unseen. Your dry-fly expert, of course, has no doubts; for him, as I understand, fishing is a kind of stalk. He goes to the river, marks his fish rising, and then warily proceeds to angle for the creature. We, in the country where I learnt the business, walk more by faith; we fish where trout should be, with the flies that they are likely to fancy. And though the other procedure sounds (and is) more skilful and more delicate, yet half the charm of angling lies in its uncertainty, its wide field for expectation, and this to the dry-fly fisher

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must be narrowly limited. Moreover, we of the simpler, more primitive method have a great variety of resource. To begin with, we also note the rise, and fish over it with care and with expectation; but if rise there is none, we rely on judgment and experience. We know by practice and by instinct where a trout should lie, and we fish there; and many of us would gladly argue by the hour whether it is more delightful to try an unknown river for the first time, or to whip over one where every stone and every break in the water is familiar as the face of a friend. In the first case, ours is the joy of skilled conjecture; in the second, that of skilled knowledge. A jutting bank, undercut by the current, an overhanging alder-bush, are welcome sights if they only arouse anticipation; perhaps more welcome still if they awaken memory of the trout we caught there, the trout we rose, the great fish we once saw rising which in all probability should still be in his fastness. And in any case judgment must come in to help memory; fish shift their places according to the height of water, and you will get a dozen good rises one day in a run where with the stream a

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foot lower—as it will be next morning—it would be useless to throw a fly.

There is, again, the choice of flies. We are no entomologists in Donegal, though I make no doubt but the skilled dry-fly fisher might, by attention to the fly on the water, get trout that we should never stir. And yet even the May-fly, when it is up, has little attraction, and other patterns kill better. The choice to be made ranges within certain small and well-known limits, and is largely a choice of sizes; it is the main point where skill tells on a lake; and that is why lake-fishing, although generally more prosperous, is so infinitely less attractive than fishing on a river.

On a lake the water is all the same before you; barring the chance of a fish that rises "to himself" within reach, you may as well throw right as left, and the merest novice can soon compass all the skill that is required to drop flies down wind light on the water. There is nothing in all sport duller than lake-fishing on a bad day, though few things pleasanter than an afternoon in the boat when trout are taking free, and there is the chance of a bigger one than common

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to keep expectation on the stretch. For then it is no simple monotonous continuance of easy undiscriminating casting; skill has a hundred chances in the quickness of the strike that is yet not too quick nor too hard; in the manœuvring of hooked fish that must be kept clear of the boat, and, if possible, clear of weeds; in the judgment that teaches you to use strain enough lest precious moments should be wasted, yet not too much lest the tiny fly should tear away or the delicate gut snap. There is room and to spare for difficulties.

Difficulties are of the essence. If it were too easy to catch fish, one would not trouble about catching them; and here where I write in North Donegal we suffer a little from that misfortune. There is a lake ten yards from my feet in which any reasonable angler could kill, on this day of cloud and westerly wind, as many herring-sized trout as would make him illustrious if he got them on a brook in Devonshire. But when one has come out to fish for salmon, small trout soon cloy, and there is the sad knowledge that the only difficulty is to beat a record for numbers, for there is no use in hoping

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for size ; a pound fish is here almost unheard of. If there were no salmon within reach it might be different, but half a mile off is the river—or what is left of it—and there, sulking at the bottom of deep holes, are the unattainable salmon. For in this most annoying of summers, while London was enduring deluges, Donegal, like the most of Ireland, suffered a drought ; and now rivers are in that condition when the wise man knows he might as well fish in a field. And so one sits and watches day after day of cloud and westerly breeze go by, and prays for a flood that comes not. The brown trout are in the lakes, and I know that any day I could catch from two to four dozen ; and, knowing it, leave them uncaught. The element of uncertainty is not sufficient, and the lake on which I might get a two-pounder is ten miles distant.

Let us reduce these data to principles. One would argue that there must be, first of all, the desire to catch fish, since the reason why I sit and write at present is that for the moment small trout have lost their charm by the side of a visionary salmon. The thing is too easy : expectation of catching

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as many as I want becomes a certainty; and I suppose that in certain regions of the world one might grow equally *blasé* even with a larger class of fish. On the other hand, it is quite clear that expectation must not sink below a certain point; however desirable the fish, there must at least be a reasonable chance of getting it, and to-day it would be simple ignorance to fish for salmon. And yet I would not say but the afternoon might see me on the river.

The precise point at which hope dies in the fisherman's heart is hard to ascertain, but that point marks the moment when fishing ceases to be a pleasure in itself. There may be, and there often are, other circumstances to make it pleasurable to be on a river; but once hope is gone, the exercise of dexterity in casting is a poor substitute. I reasoned all this out clearly to myself one afternoon this spring in Kerry. On the Monday I had travelled down to Killarney and beyond it, and had driven up long miles through a bleak ravine far into the hills till we topped a pass and came down into a valley that seemed almost as high among the mountains as Davos Platz, so steep did

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Carrantuohill tower above it. I had been greeted with the welcome news of salmon taken, and on the Tuesday I had fished for some hours in hope, with a north-westerly wind (in my face) almost blowing the rod out of my hands, and frequent lashes of cold rain. Never a sign of fish had I seen, but another angler returned with a fine salmon and news of other rises. Next day I had gone up and fished—on the most perfect-looking stretch of water, narrow between high cliffs—and again rain and wind had beaten on me, my rod was a burden, my shoulders ached, and I had seen nothing. We set our face for home, for the whole stretch of river was at our disposal after three o'clock and I had one pool of my beat unfished—a long range of flat water, perhaps two hundred yards of it, lashed into waves by the fierce gale. My mackintosh was lashed into waves also, the rain had found a way down my back, and I had the most perfect conviction that no fish were in the water. It was then that I reasoned to myself that, although there was always a chance, and three hours were left to fish in, I had ceased to believe in the least ghost of

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a hope, and that under such circumstances fishing was a slavery. I would finish the fifty yards that remained of the pool, and then, however my gillie might remonstrate, home I would go. And then, just as I had reached this laudable decision, came a heave of something pink-silvery in the grey lash of water; down he went, and the line with him, as I heard Micky's jubilant shout, "There he is!" and "You're into him!" The next moment the fish had run in towards me, I had run back, tangled the skirts of my waterproof in a brier-bush and subsided to the earth. Happily, however, even in this ignominy, I kept a tight line, and in five or six minutes of hard holding—for the bottom was all foul with snags—I had the fish wallowing on his side. But the bank was high, my gillie was nervous about reaching down, and I had to tow the creature along, past a threatening sally bush, to a handier port of access. He lay like a log on the water; I could see my fly in his mouth, and could feel my heart in my own; for it was five years since I had got a spring salmon, and of all experiences the most heart-breaking is to lose a fish that has

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been thoroughly played out and see him drift for a moment keel uppermost before he recovers his activity and disappears for ever into the bottom of the pool.

This time, however, there were no such disasters; and I need not say that after this I fished every inch of the water home, and I did not suffer again in Kerry from that heart-breaking despondency, though I only got one other fish in the week, and had to go away—*mo thruagh*—before the real sport began.

But in Kerry there was a full share of those subsidiary pleasures which, hardly less than the pursuit itself, endear the business of fly-fishing. Beautiful country to begin with; the glen sloping down from the peaked mountain, and, as it sloped, doubling into sheltered sides, where oak scrub and birch and hazel grew thick, making lovely mixtures of brown and purple, with no touch of green as yet, except about the fringes of them, which were studded thick with shining holly. And, for a greater charm still, there was good companionship, such as seldom fails one on the water in Ireland. An Irish peasant, once you get

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over the barrier of shyness, is almost always sympathetic even if he is not witty; and one who has long been mixing with another class than his own, if he is not spoilt in the process, becomes in his own way an accomplished man of the world.

In Gleneglish my friend Micky's station was that of boots at the hotel. But in twenty or thirty years there he had spent long days in company with a great variety of persons from Lord Randolph Churchill downwards, and appraised them by no means altogether as fishermen. At the first meeting one saw a large, quiet, rather stolid man, clean-shaven, with just a trace of the traditional side-whisker; but you would not talk to him long before you noted the twinkle in his eye. And as soon as we had started out he began the conversation, like any other well-bred person in Ireland, by suggesting mutual friends. He had known my brother, and therefore—Irish fashion again—knew all my kinship, and could tell me of this and that cousin or uncle. My own particular hobby, however, was novel to him, for I wanted him to talk Gaelic to me, and Micky, though he knew

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the Irish far better than English, could not conceive "why any gentleman would bother himself with such a useless language." This opened a wide field for controversy; and if we did not convince one another, I soon perceived that Micky talking Irish was a very different person from the English-speaking Micky. Micky in English was a little difficult to keep off the well-worn track of old anecdotes which some previous fishermen had told—tales of the cleverness of parrots, the cunning of Jews, or the like of that — for Micky had the tenacious memory of those who neither read nor write. But Micky in Irish was a person with his head full of queer old scraps of verse and proverbial sayings. I met him one day coming after me when I had been out alone for a forenoon, and the smile wrinkling the corners of his eyes. *Is fada do shlat gan bradán*, "It is the long rod you have with no salmon," he said, humming the words to a tune. "What song is that?" I asked, and learnt it was the beginning of a "rann" or contemptuous epigram which "some poet" had made on his enemy when he met him coming home empty-handed

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by the river. The rest of the verse had no special application to me, for it condemned the beggarly little hut and miserly pigs'-potatoes of Donough the son of John out of Deelish; but the first line I heard plenty of times from my friend Micky.

As is always the way, it was hard enough to disentangle the meaning of these quotations, for the point of them was apt to lie in an ambiguity. One poet would come into a fair and go into every booth chanting a verse that no one could tell the meaning of till he would meet another poet who would catch the riddle and improvise an answer. And many times I was no better off than the uninitiated—worse, indeed, for I could hardly distinguish the words, and Micky was always loth to explain. "It sounds very stupid in the English," he would say; and reasonably enough, for there was often a play of words involved, or some such ingenuity.

These poets hardly ever had a name, though, like every other man in that county, Micky had tales in plenty of Owen Roe O'Sullivan, the last of the famous Munster bards. Once, however, when we began to

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talk about O'Connell—or, as they still call him there in his own county, "the Counsellor"—he branched off into a tale of the Counsellor's aunt, who was a great poet, and he quoted to me the "keene" she made over her third husband, when she overheard the other women scorning at her.

They are laughing at me, the women over yonder;
For me crying so sore:
They say it is a wonder for one to be crying
That would go a third time to the altar.
I was married once to a rich noble,
And I was married a second time to a man of great store—
And it is handsome men they were;
But they died, and little I grieved for them,
Little I grieved for them or for any,
Till he died that is lying here in his coffin.
He has taken away the key of my heart,
And the lock is rusted with my tears.
I have children and I have store of cattle.
I would they were all gone from me, and he to be back.

That is about the drift of it, for I forgot to get it written down. None of the poems were of any great interest, but what interested me was to find that Micky, who in English lived entirely in the prose of things, should have a head full of scraps of song. Doubtless he remembered them from no special predilection, for he seemed to forget

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nothing; but still, English poetry and English literature was a sealed book to him, and in Irish his mind was deeply coloured with imagination.

I had an odd illustration of this. Micky, like all the world in Ireland, was familiar with stories of Finn MacCool: a little way up the glen was a rock with which Finn had made one of his giant casts. But of Ossian, Finn's son, he knew nothing, till I told him the story of the fairy woman, Niav, who came to the last feast of the Fianna, and lured Ossian away to Tir-nan-og, where he lived with her till the humour took him to return; and return he did, for all her saying, only to find his comrades dead and forgotten, and the fine country of warriors destroyed with monk and bell.

Two or three days later I was fishing before lunch in the big pool near the hotel; and there I stirred a fish, but could not induce him to rise again. While I was trying, another angler, who had a stretch of private water lower down, came past, going back to lunch, and I decided to go in with him and try again later. However, at lunch I was invited to drive down by road

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and inspect this lower water; and having decided to do so, I explained the arrangement. Micky looked disapprobation and answered in Irish, saying, "We will come back like Ossian in quest of the Fianna." But, since this conveyed no meaning to me, I judged I had misunderstood, and since I did not want to argue, I asked no more.

We went down accordingly, and walked up, fishing a little on the way, so that we reached the boat pool latish. I fished the run fruitlessly, and, seeing that the water had risen, said that the fish had probably moved up stream. "And wasn't that what I told you?" said Micky. In righteous anger I protested he had done nothing of the kind. Micky, still more indignant, retorted: "For what would you want to go down the river? Didn't I tell you we would come back, like Ossian, and all our friends would be gone?"

There in a nutshell you have the difference. Figurative expression in English was far from Micky's habit. But once Micky began to talk Gaelic, figurative expression became so natural that he could not conceive of any one stupid enough to fail of

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understanding it. It is a lasting regret to me that I was so stupid, for I might probably have hooked the fish; but the regret has served to fix in my mind a fine concrete example of the relation between language and habits of thought.

It is partly these subsidiary attractions that make me *capable de pêcher à la ligne*, and I submit them as extenuating circumstances in mitigation of the psychologist's verdict. But to anglers I need not say that the charm of angling lies in its essence, not in its accidents; and the real excuse for this essay, and, indeed, for the existence of this book, is that angling is a delight which dwells in memory, and memory likes to be revived. Not the least of the pleasures which I owe to fishing has been the pleasure of reading those writers who have written readably about the sport; and I hope that perhaps some one remote from lakes and rivers may glance over these lines and remember, with sympathy rather than with envy, the smell of bog myrtle, the whispering of the reeds, the lush growth of grass in the waterside meadows, the trout's quick rise and the tightening line; and may dream, as

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I even here am still reduced to dreaming, of the keen expectation on the bank of a stream in order where the rushing current spreads and slackens to a curl ; of the thrill as a sudden swirl boils in the water, and of the heavy downward plunge when you feel the hook go home.

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II

BY IRISH WATERS

THE most characteristic institution in Ireland is the outside car, which can be built for five-and-twenty pounds, and will carry (at a squash) seven persons. One need not affirm that it is the most comfortable of all conveyances, though we who are used to it, and have learnt the difficult art of retaining a rug in position round the knees while seated sideways, are as well pleased with it as any other; but it is emphatically the poor man's carriage. That is Ireland all over. Existence arranges itself very commodiously there for people of small means, and they can get a lot of fun for very little money. Sport is not as free as it was, but there is still a great deal of free sport, and a great deal more of sport that can be had for very small cost, because game-preserving cannot be rigidly

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enough enforced to tempt the rich Londoner. If the effect of land purchase be to break up the big fishings where these exist, I for one shall not be sorry, nor expect to see a great reduction of fish. The best river and the least poached that I know is one where, for nineteen and a half miles out of a course of twenty every man along the banks may fish when he likes, subject only to the control of the conservators.

At all events, as things are now, Ireland is no place to go to in the expectation of big fishing, except on the few famous waters, about which I know nothing. But for the man who takes his chance of salmon and trout on a holiday as cheap as Normandy or Switzerland can offer, among scenery not less beautiful, Ireland is the place; and for whoever likes the easy-going friendly way of life, and the pleasant courteous people, it is the place of all others.

Of all the desirable haunts that I have frequented in Ireland, Gleneglish seems to me, on the whole, the most desirable. Most visitors are summer guests, and know it as a place where limitless small trout can be taken in one of the little lakes under the

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Reeks. Here the historic wager was laid and won, and might probably be won again to-morrow. A gentleman backed his dog for a sovereign to catch a trout in the lake, and the bet was promptly taken. The dog, a fine retriever, was put in the boat, rowed out some hundred and fifty yards and bidden to swim ashore, which he did obediently. But before he started a good length of casting-line had been attached to his tail with flies on it, and very naturally he came ashore trailing two or three trout behind him. There is nothing wonderful in the performance; where I write, at Ardcolumb, in Donegal, on any favourable day in summer the same trick would come off.

Of the lakes of Gleneglish I saw nothing; I knew only its mountains and its river, and its pleasant peat fires, and pleasanter welcome in the little inn; yet that was enough to fall in love with. There was perhaps too short a stretch of water for the number of rods on it, yet that could have been remedied by driving or bicycling to pools which must have existed somewhere in the six miles between us and the lake whence the river streams, wonderfully clear even for a mountain

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river. And yet, mountain river though it be, it is none of your streams that are fishable in the morning and dead low by night. So deep are the pools that for a full week, I should say, you could find them in order after a flood; and no matter how high the water, it is always clear. The river that flows here out of Lough Columb has many of the same merits; but a flood will leave it yellow as pea-soup for a day, or even two days. But at Gleneglish, even when bank high, it was colourless as gin. I had an experience with one fish there which brought that home to me.

He rose in the tail of a run, so far down that, though the current dimpled the top of the water, one might almost as well have had a flat calm, except that it took the fly nicely along. I was fishing, according to prescription, with a local fly — beautifully tied but, to my Donegal notions, three or four sizes too large. As he would not move again, I defied my gillie (who was a fanatic for big tackle), and put up another claret and blue of the smallest size that can claim to be a salmon-fly. To this, with a light cast attached, he came promptly, and then

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began a double set of apprehensions. In the first place, I could see every motion of the fish, and every one of his motions was directed to boring down into the bed of boulders with which the river was paved. How one would stand it with really light tackle I cannot say, for then the fish must absolutely be left to take his own way; as it was, I held his nose up a deal harder than I should have done if I had not been seeing all the dangers that beset me. But the worst was that, though we could see the fish, we could not be sure about him. He was quite short enough to be a kelt, and the sun, which had been blazing all the time, struck through the water and showed him silvery. Was it the beautiful silver with an underglow of pink which the fresh-run fish displays, or the sickly white of an ignominious kelt? The prudent Micky could not say, though, as the fight lasted, it became clear that all was right. Yet apprehensive we were still, till he turned on his side and showed a surface that it was a privilege to put the gaff into. Short as a grilse, he (or she rather, for it was a hen-fish) turned the scale at nine pounds.

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That is the peculiar agony of spring fishing—the chance that what you hook will be a useless kelt. In the first weeks, I suppose, the chance is at least two to one, later in March perhaps one to two, and by May you are generally done with them, though one unlucky angler this year caught two in the month of July on Lough Drummond in Donegal. And the plain truth is that, for the first months in the year, the inexperienced angler ought not to use a gaff himself, or he will be in danger of committing a crime only less bad than vulpicide.

Two enthusiastic young men, not so long ago, found themselves on an early-running river, in the district between Malin Head and Berehaven; and they set out on the first day possible, full of hope. Their uncle, who watched them go, had himself parted with illusions and expected no luck; but he had neglected a plain duty, and the sense of this rose up and smote him when he met them in the evening returning, not with one fish, but with three. "I say," one boy shouted, "salmon-fishing is splendid sport." "I can't think why you didn't get more last year," struck in the other. Looking at

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their radiant faces, the uncle had scarcely the heart to disappoint them; he knew himself also the moral author of this guilt. What was worse, he knew (for the meeting had taken place in the village) that every one else knew all about it. Weakly he hinted, "I am afraid those fish don't look quite right." "Nonsense," cried the youths, "they're salmon. Why, what should be wrong with them?" And yet the glow was dead in their faces; they had begun to remember what they had heard about kelts.

Just at that moment the head and front of local poachers arrived, as is the wont of such worthies, most inopportunely on the scene, and he looked with an inquiring eye at the three long, lank, and slimy corpses which ought to have been on their way seawards, to return, if fate spared them, in three months, valiant, glowing, and desirable. "I don't think these fish look quite the thing, Tom," said the uncle apologetically. Tom rubbed his nose. "I doubt not, your honour."

They dug three graves that evening and buried the victims. But such deeds are ill concealed.

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Sorry as I am for those two young men, I am sorrier for another novice of whose defeat I heard. One of my friends was fishing, again in spring, when he espied to his amazement a fine salmon dead and adrift in the river. With the help of his gaff he reached it and brought it to the bank. Decay had hardly set in, if at all, and it was a fish well over fifteen pounds; and there, evident in its side, was the mark of an earlier gaff.

How it came there remained a mystery for weeks, till at last another angler explained the riddle. New to the business, he had gone out; he had hooked the fish and played him, with the usual sickening doubt at the back of his consciousness; and at last, seeing the opportunity, had gaffed him successfully, yet with an unsettled mind. Once the fish was on the bank, doubts redoubled in him. Kelts, he knew, were bright as a sixpence; this fish was silvery all over—small wonder, and it fresh from the sea. He knew they were long, and the more he looked at this one the more to his doubting eye the proportion of girth dwindled. Above all, he had read of

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captures of salmon; they had always rushed, plunged, and shot like a bar of silver into the air; he had seen a grilse caught the year before, and it had behaved in quite the orthodox manner and gone through all the tricks. But this fish, which would make three of it, had simply circled sluggishly about the pool, and at last allowed itself to be dragged heavily in reach—and he had gaffed it! Yet that was how a kelt was reported to behave. The more he looked at it, the less certain he could feel that this was no kelt; the more he doubted of his good fortune, the more dreadful grew the thought of ridicule if he were wrong. And so at last, unable to bear it longer, he thrust his quarry secretly into the river and fled home, feeling like a criminal—having in reality killed and thrown away his first spring fish.

There are many morals to this story, but I spare to draw them,—owning, however, that more than once this year at Gleneglish, when I found myself fishing unaccompanied by Micky, I almost feared to get into a fish lest my knowledge should prove unequal to the strain that would be put upon it.

Next to Gleneglish, the pleasantest fishing

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quarters known to me are at Clochan in the north-west of Ireland. In one material respect Clochan is more to my taste than even Gleneglish, for it has a sea-pool, and where there is a sea-pool white trout are always to be come by. Most anglers will agree that there is a special charm about a place where every tide may bring up fresh fish, and even in the lowest of low water there is an off-chance. And again and again I have saved myself from a blank day by going down, putting up the finest of tackle, and getting perhaps one fish, perhaps two, that may not weigh over three-quarters of a pound at best, perhaps not even over half a pound, but that run and fight and leap in a way to delight you, and make next morning's breakfast a thing to be desired.

Clochan village lies a matter of three miles back from the Atlantic, but it stands on the slope of hills facing seaward ; and on the right hand of the river valley a great mountain rises, whose outer face is sheer cliff. In the gap you see across a long stretch—some thirty miles of blue water—to the far-off Connaught peaks and shore-line; and the estuary of the river winds in and

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in between the mountainous sides. Round the flank of Slieve Lewy another stream comes down, almost precipitously for the last half-mile, yet with a fall so stepped and broken in short cataracts and deep whirling pools that sea-trout and even salmon work their way up. It passes under a bridge some fifty yards before its junction with the larger Glen River, and where the waters meet is the sea-pool, which thus has two separate races of water and two swirling streams in it. Up to this the tide comes and no farther, for just above the sea-pool the Glen River plunges wildly down a brief succession of strong falls, its whole volume of water pent into a width of some fifteen feet, except when heavy rain has fallen, and rocks and passage are all confused in one wild rush.

But when the water is high, an angler will not be on the sea-pool if he can help it; his place is up towards the mountain on the lovely ranges and turning pools of the main river. The sea-pool is known to me chiefly when no other place on the stream was fishable, and it is mainly then that I have tried this stretch of water, and seldom drawn a

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total blank. In the deep pool, too, under the bridge of the little river, I have caught good brown trout by careful up-stream casting, but for some reason have never seen in it sign of sea-trout or salmon, though it looks a perfect harbourage. But just where the little river flows into the sea-pool, making a fan-shaped commotion in the water, I have seen again and again the short quick plunge, and heard my reel shriek for a moment as if a two-pounder were on the line.

Why it should be that I have done no good in the runs below this when the falling tide leaves them still with plenty of water, yet with a broken surface, I cannot guess; but some day or other I hope for better luck. Up in the valley, however, to which you climb (for it is a climb rather than a walk) from the sea-level, matters have gone better with me. The Owen Buidhe is smaller than the Glen River, but it runs down less quickly; and three or four times I have abandoned my chance on the bigger water, and come home justified by a white trout of a pound or two when other anglers were empty-handed. Far away up in the mountain there are deep little peaty pools,

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and if a breeze hits them, and the trout be there, the chance is not so bad. Yet the best of these pools is associated in my mind with two sad disappointments.

The Owen Buidhe has three levels: first, that of the sea-pool, from which you climb to meet perhaps half a mile of fishing water; then there is another endless series of steep shallows, and beyond that a long, long stretch where the stream, deep now and narrow, winds among bog. It was in the lugubrious autumn of 1902 when no one in Donegal could get a fish, big or little; and we had gone up to fish one of the lakes for herring-sized brown trout, which can, of course, always be come by. A feeder of the Owen Buidhe comes from this lake, and we followed it down to the upper level. Here, after beguiling some brown trout, I came on a somewhat wider stretch, and to my joy saw the swirl of a big fish to my tiny claret —a salmon pattern, with bright yellows and greens in the wing, but tied down to trout size. It was the more joy to get this sea-trout—a two-pounder—because we had left the lake on the chance that a heavy thunder-shower which struck us might have set fish

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rising. And having got one, we fished down hopefully, though the sky blackened like ink. Just as we reached the lower level of the river, the rain began to come; my companion fled to the hotel, I to the biggest of the pools. There I fished in such a tempest of rain and wind as I have seldom felt beat upon me; streams ran down my back. But I got first one white half-pounder, then another; and then the big fish rose—and missed the fly. Whose fault it was—mine or his—that he would not come back, who shall determine? But I had to go, leaving him untouched. Next day we decided to give up fishing and make an excursion; but our road lay up the Owen Buidhe valley, the wind was high, and I took the rod for a throw. I fished the pool down and there, at the very tail of it, my claret fly was suddenly fast in him—salmon or heavy white trout, as the case might be. Which it was, alas! I shall never know; for in a minute or two my fly came out as I was simply holding him, and I missed—if salmon it was, and I think so—my one chance, for that summer, of a salmon.

Good as the fishing at Clochan can be on

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occasion, it is not the chief attraction of the place. Hardly anywhere else in Ireland is there scenery of such grandeur. The special fame of it is derived from the great sea-cliff; yet that has never seemed to me so imposing, for all its gigantic proportions, as a certain wild glen, six hilly miles to the north; and for beauty I have never anywhere seen anything so wonderful as was, on the day when I lost my fish, the headland which lies between the cliff and the glen. It is a spot which Leighton haunted, establishing himself year after year in a little white-washed house hedged about, after the local fashion there, with the small-flowered scarlet fuchsia; and whether one likes Leighton's painting or no, there is no denying that he had the sense of beauty. And I have seen high-piled and glorious cloud-backgrounds in his work which, I am very sure, were a memory of what he looked upon as he faced across the Atlantic on an autumn evening.

This afternoon we left our bicycles at a cottage and walked on to the headland, where it projects westward, a broad rounded stretch of grass—grass crisp and clean as it only grows by cliff edges, and cropped to the

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very soil by many sheep. Beyond was sea and sea—bays to our right and to our left, and before us the limitless expanse in all its glory. Small cattle pasturing showed silhouetted against the blue — like antelopes they seemed, a part of the wild scene, with no hint of domestication about them. In our ears sounded the wild screams of gulls, and with these, far-off shrieks of small ragged boys at play round a turf stack. We walked on and on over the springy turf, past the small ragamuffins, who fled first, and then followed; each, when we turned to look at him, dropping to the ground, and rolling there, head down like a crouching rabbit, shy and roguish. On and on we went over the expanse of golden green toward the cliff edge. Seaward was the broad field of blue, overlaid, in tracery innumerable, with a shimmering mist of sunlight; at the horizon an undistinguished brightness, neither white, nor blue, nor silver; ethereal, aerial brightness, as of fairy milk. Above was fine-spun cloud weft that grew into gauzy drifts streaming across the blue. Blue was above us, blue below and around; at our feet the unbroken spread of sunlit green; all

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vague, all large, till we reached the very cliff, and suddenly detail burst on us—the rock, sun-smitten, black, and savagely grand; stretching out from it, the blue sea, dashed with white; and just under our feet at the cliff's base, green water, greener far than any glass or emerald. On it the mass and swirls of foam swayed back and forward, or were flung crossways by wind and wave; they made a whiteness solid, yet so brilliant as to seem transparent. In a kind of rapture we looked down upon purest white, purest green, purest blue, that eye can behold, wrought into being by the great wash of the Atlantic, working in unison with the clean wind and clean sun of this unpolluted place. But the very heart of the picture was an eddy under the cliff's blackness where blue, green, and white all blended and merged into one indescribable glory of shot colour, such a painter's palette as was never seen on earth.

Turning away at last, we walked on by the cliff's edge, fluted and carved at the top by sharp feet of sheep through endless generations, to a gully out of which whirled up a bevy of black wings from dark shadow into full sunlight; and, as they swerved from us,

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sunshine caught the scarlet beaks and scarlet feet of the choughs, making them glow like coral against the sheeny blackness of their plumage. And down below a crevice led to the passage through which, the story goes, Prince Charlie crept daily, and so gained an outward facing ledge of green, invisible save from a boat, where he sat and stared all day at the waste of water, hoping for a French pennant and the sail of his deliverance.

A pleasure like this is not of the eye only ; you drink in the taste of the sea like wine, and the feeling of vast unconfined space lifts and expands you. And you can get such pleasure in a hundred places through western Ireland from Donegal to Kerry, with the knowledge that when the grey huddle of cloud comes over the sky, and heather is wet to travel, and your mere sightseer curses the elements, the angler may be out by the river, following a delightful business which brings him into ready touch and sympathy, if he is willing, with every peasant that he meets along the bank.

I may add that it is safe to let any casual spectator gaff your fish. They are all familiar with the implement.

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III

ST. BRIGID'S FLOOD

FOUR or five men were gathered together that evening in Forsyth's rooms, talking the usual talk of anglers when they congregate — flies, bait, good days, bad days, droughts, and floods. Forsyth was just expressing his preference for the extreme type of flood river—

"A regular mountain stream, you know —no lake on it, no feeders to speak of, but just the scourings of the hills. When it comes down there's no need to bother about waiting till it clears; you watch till it stops rising, and then fish at once; and some time or other when you're on the water you're pretty sure to hit the psychological moment."

"Yes; but how long does it last?" put in Legge.

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"Oh, an hour, two hours, six hours. But it's amusing, anyhow, to watch the water changing; it keeps up the interest—it's dramatic. I've seen a stream at Carrick get up five feet in the night, and go down to where it was in the forenoon."

"If you come to that," said Grayson, knocking his pipe on the mantelpiece, "I've seen a flood get up about five feet in five minutes."

Grayson was a man none of us had seen before. Forsyth had picked him up somewhere in Ireland. So, although what he said sounded pretty steep, none of us hooted.

"You mean a tide wave," Legge suggested politely.

"Not in the least; just a flood out of the mountains like what Forsyth talks of. And if you like them dramatic, Forsyth, you'd have had your heart's content that time."

"Well," said Forsyth, "I know they get the devil's own floods in the West of Ireland; but I don't see how that could have happened in the natural order of things."

"I don't say that it did," answered Grayson; "and anyhow, there were a good many

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people thought it didn't. They thought exactly as you say, that it was the devil's own production, or, to be quite accurate, the work of St. Brigid, if you ever heard of her."

"No," said Forsyth; "but expound."

"Well," said Grayson, as he filled his pipe and settled down to narrative, "I'm not strong on saints; but St. Brigid has a lot of sacred places all through Ireland, and just up near Killala there's a well that she's supposed to have blessed. I was staying on the other side of the country at a place called Teelin, in the direction of Blacksod, where I had leave to fish the Bunlin River. It was a pretty wild place, I tell you, in those days; for the nearest rail was thirty miles off, and there weren't many of the amenities of life at the inn. The fishing was no good either; for the place was a regular nest of poachers, and they had scooped out nearly every fish that was in the pools, so far as I could hear or see. I would have chucked it, only for a ruffian there that I made friends with—head and front of all the poachers of the district, by his own story; but he gillied for me in the daytime, and used to show me outlying

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streams where I got some sport. And he swore to me by all his gods that the weather was making up for a big flood, and then there would be great fishing in the Bunlin. Besides, he was very good company; so I stayed.

"I liked the people too, and I had got pretty friendly with them, though they didn't much care for strangers. You see, the only strangers who ever came there were sporting tourists, and interfered with peaceable poaching; there wasn't much to bring any one else. My word, but it was a desolate place! Great brown moors sloping down off mountains that had no particular shape, and running into great brown wastes of bog that stretched away out towards the sea. You hadn't even the comfort of looking out to the ocean horizon, for there is a kind of low neck of land that runs between that country and the Atlantic. So you saw nothing on earth but brown shapeless bog and heather in all directions: just a little tillage along the river of course, but practically a bare wilderness of bog. And the valley of the river, so far as my fishing went, ran pretty straight east and

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west. It had no surprises or nooks or little prettinesses about it, but was just as broad and bare as a valley can be. Only at the boundary of my water it took a sharp turn, and the river was jammed up tight in a winding cleft. Dan, my poacher friend, was always talking to me about the splendid pool there was just above here; and one day when we were doing no good at all, I left him my rod—he was always mad keen to be fishing himself—and walked up to look at it.

"He said I couldn't miss it, and neither I could. When I got to the bridge—for I had struck back to the road—I could hear the rush of the little fall about fifty yards down, and I walked to it. The river came at an angle to the fall, and then it had a straight swift course of about a hundred yards in a deep confined channel. That day there was a lovely run at the head of it, but in any kind of flood the tail of the pool would be the chance. The place was a regular gorge. I walked down the right bank, which was just a handy height for fishing, but the other was a kind of cliff—you could see the track going up and down

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it like a sheep-run. At the end of the pool the sides of the gorge narrowed in again, so that I don't suppose the water was thirty feet across; but just there on the far side the cliff drew back from the bank, and right in by the river was a cottage, a good bit better-looking than most of them. I would have thought it must have belonged to a keeper, only that on my side there was a watcher's hut built of scraws of turf, and presumably put there to observe the man on the spot. I remember thinking as I looked at it that I wouldn't mind being the man on the spot, if I had a rod on the water, for the site was charming. The cottage was regularly in the arms of the hill; and it faced down the valley about south-west, with its gable-end to the river, protected from the westerly draught up the valley by a little knoll. He was probably a 'well-doing' man, too, for just below this kind of gully the river curved to the right, and left a dozen acres or so of fairly level ground between it and the hills. All this was down in crops, cut up with stone walls, and there was only one other cottage near by—a much poorer one, too—so he probably

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held most of it. You see, I was taking stock of the place against the time when I should be a tenant.

"All the same, I should probably have forgotten most of these details; only, I fancy, one's memory is a sort of sensitive plate, which takes impressions, but they sink gradually in and fade into a blur unless something fixes them. Well, in this case I had the lines bitten in, pretty hard, just afterwards, in a way that stamped in my mind the position of that cottage, and the fact that the man had only one near neighbour. Just in the same way I am not likely to forget what otherwise would have faded away in a few days or weeks or months—the look of a fellow who came out of the cottage-door and stared at me across the river—a big, burly, dark-complexioned ruffian. I said to myself at once, 'That man's been in America.' You know the type, Forsyth—rather aggressive. 'I'm as good as you anyway'—that sort of air. He was clean-shaven, too; that was another mark, for the men there all wear the beard, or else the old-fashioned scrap of whisker. Well, I went on down stream, and never

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gave him another thought; but the whole thing came back on me in a flash when I saw him again—lying quiet enough. That was when the first picture got bitten in and fixed.

"Just in the same way I shall always remember noticing an unusual feature in the landscape—a great massive outcrop of rock on the mountain-side straight above the cottage. It broke the featureless character of the hills, and there was a big patch of that orange lichen on it that caught the sun finely, and it was good to look at. But especially I noticed it because it set me thinking of a man called Bowen, a sort of professor who used to fish with me, and do a lot of geologising and botanising on off-days. He would have been bound to invent some theory to explain why that great lump stayed there sticking out, while all the hill-slopes about were being pared off smooth. And afterwards, when the event happened, I wrote to him to come and look at geology in the making, but he was in the Andes or somewhere. Only, it wouldn't have done for him to theorise in Teelin about what happened. Everybody in Teelin is very

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clear that if the rock was there, it was put there with a purpose.

"However, of course, the day I was up there I was thinking of nothing except that the pool was a splendid holding pool, and that a man might possibly kill fish in it even in low water, and that it probably wasn't swept out with nets, and probably all mine were. At all events, Dan wasn't able to stir anything in them, no more than I could. But he said the weather was going to break, and he was right enough.

"It was the night before the 27th of August, when it broke with a lot of thunder and rain, and in the morning it was bright again; but the river was still rising, or anyhow not falling. I went out and fished for a bit, waiting for the psychological moment that Forsyth talks about; but Dan said there was more water to come and the fish wouldn't rise, though they were up from the sea, for I saw them moving. By about four o'clock it came on such a downpour as I hardly ever was out in, and the day blackened and grew cold. You never saw anything so forsaken as that valley looked in the drift of water and smother of

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grey cloud. I went in, and while I was changing it broke into thunder again—the kind of thunder when you hear the sky torn across with a rip just over your head, and the lightning makes you blink. In that kind of storm human beings are just like animals, they always drift together; and I was a human being, so I went downstairs into the little shop. You know the kind of place—a clay floor between two counters: one counter is the bar, which is slopped over with stale porter; the other is the shop, where they sell damp matches, and envelopes gummed together, and tea and biscuits, and every necessary of life in its least attractive form; and the whole place reeks of porter and paraffin, and bacon, and several other fragrances, and there is a window looking to the street, hermetically closed.

"The entire household was there, of course. Michael Flynn, the big chap who kept the hotel, was behind the bar. He wore a Newgate fringe, not very much bristlier than his eyebrows; his son was rummaging for something in a dark corner, and the two girls were at the counter.

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Dan Keary was discoursing to Flynn across the bar with a couple of other worthies, and there was a woman sitting in the only chair, with her hands crossed on a parcel in her lap and her head down. She had evidently come in from the country for shopping and been weather-bound, and at the first look I thought she was in a bad fright. Anyhow, she was perfectly silent, but her lips were moving all the time. The two girls were giggling rather nervously.

"I was feeling rather divided in my mind about this flood, for it seemed as if my luck was to come at the expense of a lot of poor people. I expected to hear talk of nothing but the desperate damage to the oats—which, of course, were being laid as flat as a board. But, to my surprise, the only thing that the men were discussing was the effect upon a sort of pious picnic—the excursion to a station at the Holy Well. 'There was three carloads of them went through here this morning about eight o'clock,' Michael Flynn said, 'and one girl with a bad cough on her this while back.' 'Faith,' said Dan, 'maybe she would have been better in her bed a day like this.' But

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Flynn was a very devout man, and he would not hear of this. 'Well, now, I always heard it for a fact that there was never any one yet that went to that Well in a right mind, and did what was set down for to be done, but they were the better of going—saving always,' he said, looking sharp at the woman, who was sitting mumbling to herself, 'that they would ask something not fit to be granted.'

"I made a note, after my habit, to ask Dan for some explanation at a more convenient season. Just then, before any more could be said, we heard feet running down the road, the door was thrown open, and three men stepped in; the rain streaming off them made pools on the floor. The moment they spoke it was plain they belonged to another county, and I said to Dan, 'Who are they?' 'Three Highlanders out of Donegal working on a conthrack,' he told me. The last of them to enter was one of the most powerful human beings I ever looked at—very tall and rather gaunt, with a small head and a jaw like a pike's; high cheekbones, forehead dinted in, and small deep-set eyes. In spite of its rugged-

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ness, the face was pleasant though, a queer mixture of good-humour and possible ferocity. They stood there in a group dripping in the doorway, a little shy; and behind them was the strange unnatural darkness of the evening, darker than it would have been most days at eight o'clock.

"'God save us all, Neil,' said Mick Flynn, speaking to the big man, 'what kind of weather is that to be taking the road in? Is it from Mike O'Hanlon's you're coming?'

"'We thought it was quieter out of doors nor in,' the man answered, with a twinkle in his eye. Then he caught sight of the woman sitting there, and turned away from Flynn. 'That's a wild evening, Mrs. O'Hea,' he said.

"Obviously he didn't want to talk; but there was a quick-eyed little fellow with him who was ready enough, and I saw Dan making up to him. 'Was there any quarrel between yez and the O'Hanlons?'

"'There was quarrel enough, then, if Neil M'Nelis was as brave as he's big,' the little man said, spitting viciously on the ground. 'But he's that cautious like, he was afeard of killing Johnny O'Hanlon.

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Wasn't that what he told us, William?' he asked, turning to the other Donegal man.

"The big fellow interrupted before he could get an answer. 'Bad luck to my tongue, then, if I told you what was not to be repeated, Ned M'Cormick. And if there was any trouble at all, wasn't it because you were for ever threeping it to Johnny O'Hanlon that I could beat him with a hand tied behind me? An' right well I know the kind of him, that if there was to be a fight, he's not the one that would quet it in a hurry. An' the drink was in him at the time he spoke.'

"'Well, now,' said Michael Flynn in his judicial way, 'take my word for it, Neil, you done right. If it was in Mike O'Hanlon's house you were, and he seen any kind of fight and his brother getting worsted, he'd not stay looking.'

"'An' if you beat the two of them,' Dan Keary put in, 'the O'Hanlons are a terrible strong clan, and they'd keep it up on you as long as you were in this country.'

"'Well,' said the big man, 'if Johnny O'Hanlon was looking help, he needn't go far to look it this day. There was half the

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O'Hanlons in the country-side in Mike's house before we quet.'

"'Ay, troth,' said Ned M'Cormick, 'and great diversion with them. There was Mike himself and the wife and four childer: that's six; and there was Johnny O'Hanlon that came in middling cheerful from the station at Killala, and Black Peter Maloney with him, and his wife, that's Michael's sister: that's nine now. An' a couple more of them, cousins, John O'Hanlon and his wife, that came running in out of the rain from off the road. That's eleven.'

"'Ay,' said the other Donegal man, 'and the fiddler with them that was making down here for Teelin, against the fair. An' they had him up in the corner playin' for them to dance, before Johnny began to strip and square up at Neil thonder.'

"'Lord save us! such a houseful,' said Mick Flynn; 'twelve of them, and the three of you.'

"'Faith, there was one more, or the ninth part of one,' said Ned M'Cormick. 'For Michael had the tailor in with him making a new coat agin the fair.' Then he turned to the woman that was sitting there, and he

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had a malicious look in his little eyes. I had noticed she had stopped mumbling to herself, and was listening very intently. The little fellow had noticed her too, but he made believe to be just catching sight of her.

"'Och, and is that yourself, Mrs. O'Hea? Troth, then, Michael was talking of you: for he says to the tailor, "God help you if the coat's not everything it ought to be. I'm for the fair at Teelin, and I'm bound to meet my sweetheart, Biddy O'Hea, and I'd like to be lookin' my best."'

"She was an oldish woman, about fifty, I daresay, with a large, plain, round face; and her face itself didn't change much. But the whole of her body shook and bent together as she sat, and her fingers crisped themselves in a spasm of rage; and she spoke, but the words came so fast and broken that I couldn't hear what she was saying; only it was plain enough it wasn't sweet to hear.

"But M'Nelis took the little fellow by the shoulder and swung him round towards the door. 'Bad luck to you for a spiteful wee divil!' said he. 'Sure, Mrs. O'Hea, don't mind his talk.'

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"But she got up and she gathered her shawl round herself and her parcel, with hands still shaking violently, and she began to speak, in the sing-song voice like a chant that Irish country people often fall into when they are in a passion.

"'"'Twas on St. Brigid's day I put my curse on Mike O'Hanlon and all that belongs to him and draws breath in his house. May the breath choke in their throats! was the word I said, and I went to St. Brigid's own water to say it. An' to-day there's a station at the Well, and the whole of the O'Hanlons is gathered under one roof, and them dancing and singing. An' my curse is on them an' them dancing and singing.'

"There wasn't one of us that said a word, and for my own part I was what they call in my country 'touched under.' There's a lot of sound physiological observation in that phrase, if you think of it. She went across to the door, and just as she had it open, she turned and said to M'Nelis, 'How many was in the O'Hanlons' house when you left it?' Then the door shut on her, and there was dead silence again,

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till one of the girls spoke with a frightened titter—

"'Lord save us! that's an awful woman.'

"'She's a bloody witch,' snapped out little M'Cormick, who had turned a sort of green.

"'Mind you, how quick she was to reckon out the thirteen,' said Mick Flynn reflectively. 'Eleven O'Hanlons and the fiddler and the tailor. An' not one of us here or there noticed it.'

"'Is it them notice it?' Dan struck in; 'sure Michael would not value it a snuff of a candle if he knew. What does he care about the like of that? Just the very same as he cares about Biddy O'Hea and her curses. Hasn't he heard her curse him like that a hundher times? And doesn't he see her stand at the door of her cottage cursing him, and him going out in the morning and coming in at night?'

"'Well and well! Still and all, it's a wild evening, and I'm thinking, M'Nelis, maybe coming out of that was the best thing ever you did. Come now, boys, a glass of whisky to put us in better heart.'

"The thunder by that time was growling

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away in the distance, the rain had slackened a bit, and I was mighty curious about all this. What was even more important, I didn't want my gillie to go on the burst. So after one glass I hauled the reluctant Dan out with me to look at the river, knowing that if I got him as far as the bridge I could speed him on to Mrs. Dan with some remnants of my half-crown in his pocket.

"The hotel stands where the main road up and down the valley is met at right angles by another making straight for the bridge, at which my fishing started. It was clearing a bit seawards, and the main rack of cloud came that way from the south-west. But up the valley, in among the hills, it looked wilder than ever; there was simply a black mass of vapour, twisted into queer shapes, apparently with a strong swirl from the east coming up against the general drift. Dan looked up at it.

"'Begor! Biddy O'Hea will get a cooling for her anger before she's gone far. Wouldn't you think the sky was going to fall? 'Twill be down on top of her before she gets to Dohoomiss Bridge.'

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"'Is it up there she lives?' I said.

"'You know the long pool you were looking at? Well, just a piece below that.'

"I thought for a moment he meant the cottage I had my eye on, opposite the watcher's hut, and said so.

"'No, sir,' said Dan; 'that's where her enemy lives—O'Hanlon.' Then I began to understand.

"'A big, black, clean-shaven fellow?' I said.

"'That's the very man. You seen him up there? Well, you might notice Biddy's cottage away back a bit in the hill. The way to it would be past O'Hanlon's; but he keeps a wicked dog there, and Biddy has a track now made for herself over the mountain. Och, yes,'—for I asked him the obvious question,—'but what can the craythur do? She's a widdy woman with a weak family of girls, an' she got bad usage from Mick O'Hanlon first and last.'

"I asked him what they fell out about. 'It was about some geese,' said Dan, seeming to think that a final explanation. When I pressed for more details, it seemed that O'Hanlon said that she had stolen his and

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sold them, or she said that he had stolen hers—I forget which. Anyhow, Dan thought that the geese had been straying by the road and were just lifted by some of those fellows that go through driving big flocks of them to market. Then his cows got into her corn, and her cows got into his corn, and they accused one another of breaking down fences on purpose, and so it went on. I think maybe Dan was right, and there's no call to look for other reasons why those people should hate one another. In a town nobody has time to have enemies. It's only in the country that hatreds really ripen. You see a person going in and going out every day—he's part of the landscape almost—and every time you see him, hate stirs in your belly. And you see few other people—hardly any one else in a case like this. He fills the whole field of your vision. Then there are always these little incidents of geese, and gaps, and the like of that; and there's worse. His potatoes are growing near your potatoes, and his corn near your corn, and either you rejoice to see his doing worse, or you hate him like hell because his are doing better. That's

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the way you get a really fine well-rooted specimen of hate, that gets its nurture daily and grows like a tree. Love and hatred are both of them very much a matter of proximity, and your neighbour is twice as much your neighbour in the country.

"Still, everywhere in Arcadia you have these sort of feuds, and they aren't explosive. They simply blacken a nature slowly, they don't result in act. But in this case there was another feud which might very well have passed over, only that it underlay this hatred begotten of proximity, and was kept warm. There was a history—commonplace enough, but dramatic in the ordinary way. I got it out of Dan by cross-questioning. This fellow Mike O'Hanlon was always what Dan called 'a boyo': he was a poacher and a stiller of whisky, of course, but Dan thought little of that. Only he broke the laws that these people respected as well as the laws they did not; he neglected his duty at confession, and he was pretty miscellaneous in his sweethearting. You know, of course, the peculiarity of Irish Catholics: they don't like sexual irregularity; and the wilder and more outlandish

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a place is in Ireland, the fewer illegitimate births there are. It may be temperament, tradition, training — I don't know which. But anyhow the fact is certain. A man who runs loose is counted irreligious and disapproved of, and a woman who makes a slip might nearly as well hang herself at once. Well, in the course of his adventures Mike O'Hanlon came across Biddy O'Hea, who was then Biddy something else, and she was a woman of strong will and a violent temper, and she wanted to marry Mike. But she had no fortune, and anyhow very likely he had no notion of settling down. Perhaps she counted on that. But what she did was to marry a very old man who held this little farm up by the long pool. I couldn't get anything clear about dates; but there were children born, and after some time there was a fierce quarrel between Mike O'Hanlon and his father, and the priest was mixed up in it, and Mike went off to America. The pretext was some trouble about the seizure of a still, when the police were assaulted and one man badly hurt, and it was thought that Mike might be wanted. But Dan seemed to think that the reason why there

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was not the usual evidence forthcoming to establish Mike's *alibi* was that Mike's father and the priest wanted him out of the country.

"After a while old O'Hanlon died, and Mike came back to take up the farm, and, according to Dan, his morals were none the better. America is a questionable school, and there was a fellow out of a very lawless parish that I knew, who came back after a couple of years, saying he never seen wickedness right till he seen it in the streets of New York. The contact with civilisation is not always a success for primitive natures. As Dan put it, there was no Christianity left in Mike O'Hanlon. Well, when he came back, Biddy O'Hea's old man was dead, and the priest himself tried to make up a marriage. But, as Dan said, 'Faith, Michael was a good match now, and the wee house down by the pool was on the way to Biddy's, and there was a girl in it with a fortune of a hundher and fifty pound, and Mike carried his courting no farther nor that.' So you may judge if the widow was kindly disposed to her neighbours when Mike settled in there. And I would say

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that in the slanging matches the geese and the gaps and the rest of it figured principally as a pretext.

"I don't know when the public quarrelling began or how long it went on; the gatherings when it happened would only come once or twice a year. Only it became recognised that whenever Mike O'Hanlon and Biddy O'Hea met in a fair, there would always be this sort of encounter. And, although O'Hanlon had the best of it for the rest of the year, and could always retort on her, and did, about her dirty little house and the weeds in her corn, and her starved-looking pony and so on, still, as Dan said, 'she had the tongue of him,' and public opinion was on her side. Well, I suppose the man wanted to silence her once and for all, and he didn't care how he did it, for, as I tell you, there was no Christianity in him. At all events the crisis came when they met in Teelin at a market, and Dan was there and went up to listen.

"'She joined on him at once,' he said, 'and maybe she didn't give him a dressing down. An' Mike stood there, with his back turned, letting on not to hear her,

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when all the while there was a ring of people round them, the same as there would be round a fight. "An'," says she at last, "I wouldn't put clean pigs to sleep with that dirty ugly lump of a woman you have, and them little red leprechauns of childer." An' at that Mike turned his head an' his shoulder and says, "Well, there's two fine black-haired girls in your own house anyway, and proud I am of them; for it was little your ould crooked O'Hea had to do with the making of them." An' then he turned on her and laughed in her face, wicked-like. "Och, Biddy," says he, "don't be too hard on your old sweetheart." And when she heard that she turned the colour of that stone,' said Dan, striking on the bridge parapet, 'and you would have thought she was going to drop; but faith, not she. She up with her hands like that to the sky, and she prayed God the words might choke in the throat of him. But you heard her cursing him herself, and I needn't be telling you the way of it. And sure it was no wonder she would be mad, for what person at all would put up with a thing like that cast up to them, let it be true or false—

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barring one that had no spirit at all in them?'

"'She doesn't want for spirit anyhow, if she faced a storm like this,' I said, looking up the valley. 'They're getting it heavy up there. I suppose now she won't mind seeing her own crops go if his are washed out?'

"The whole head of the valley was lost in a black welter of cloud, as if a curtain was dropped between us and it. Dan took out his pipe and spat hard—

"'She's a desperate woman that. What did she do but make the whole journey in her bare feet to the Holy Well, and she said a station backwards on him: ay, the whole of it, the five Paternosters and the five Hail Marys, and the prayer to Saint Brigid herself; every one of them backwards, beginning at the Amen, and praying that she might get the thing she desired, and that was the death by suffocating of Mike O'Hanlon and all his family.'

"I remember the way Dan mouthed out the long words as if he enjoyed them, and I remember trying to say something in chaff about O'Hanlon's being in no danger of

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choking from drought, when Dan interrupted me. We were leaning both of us with our arms on the parapet of the bridge, looking up a long stretch they called the mill-pool, and watching the water automatically as it came tearing down—hardly discoloured at all, for there was no laboured land worth speaking of in the drainage. Suddenly Dan said to me in a puzzled way, 'The water's falling.'

"It sounded impossible; but sure enough at the ford, about fifty yards up, the break of a stone was showing. I looked up the valley: the sky was clearing, and for a minute I thought it had been only a local storm, and the upper water got none of it. But the river was running down now like the sand in an hour-glass—'Be damned to me if ever I see the like of that!' said Dan. Then he gave a shout, 'Oh, merciful Jesus, look there!'

"There was no need for him to point up the stream, I tell you. A great yellow mass came round the corner up above, and broke into the mill-pool. It spread a bit then, but still it came on in a regular wall fully a foot high, and thick and muddy. Dan stood

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staring; but I caught hold of him, 'Run, man! the bridge'll go.' It didn't go, though; but I've often thought since that if it had we might as well have been on top of it as watching the flood from the roadway. I'll never forget the roar, ending in a sort of smack, as it came up against the masonry. There was a lot of stuff floating, of course; but only small things, till we saw a brownish mass coming down—it came at an awful pace. 'Here's a hayrick,' I said; but just as it reached the ford, I suppose, a rock met it, and it wallowed right over. There wasn't the least doubt about it—it was half the thatch of a house. Well, I don't think I'm superstitious; but the only difference between Dan and me was that I said nothing and he spoke out. 'As sure as death,' he said, 'it's O'Hanlon's. The whole of them's drownded.'

"We started running back to the village, when a thought struck me. 'Go you and give the alarm,' I said; 'I'm going up to Cudheen to see would there be anything there.'

"Cudheen was the name of a pool just above the mill-pool, and there was a tongue

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of gravel sticking out there; it was the sharpest bend on the river. I left Dan and ran across the fields; but when I got to the bank the stream had cut a new course for itself: the spit was gone, and instead of curving in by the left bank, it rushed straight down. Only it had gone down nearly as quick as it had risen, and on the gravel bank at my feet there was a man lying, with only his legs in the water. It was O'Hanlon right enough.

"I dragged him high and dry. There was no use trying to do anything. In a minute Dan and three or four other fellows were up with me. 'Lord save us!' was pretty much all they said. Then Dan spotted a thing I hadn't noticed. The coat was on the man, but twisted round the body, only one arm in the sleeve. And it was a half-made coat, just roughly stitched together.

"'Do you mind that?' Dan said. 'He was just trying it on when the flood took him. Boys, but it must have been suddent.'

"The more I thought of it, the less I could understand what had happened. I told them to take the body up to the

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roadside and into the village, and I started up the valley to see what had happened, on the off-chance of giving help. But I had no more doubt in my mind that Biddy O'Hea's curse had been fulfilled to the letter than any of the rest of them.

"I suppose it was about two miles up the road to the bridge, and we ran, or half ran, every step of the way. The rain was over, and it was clearer, if anything, than it had been; but still everything was that kind of blackish grey. About a mile up we took a short cut across a corner of hill, and as we got to the top of it, I saw a woman along the road on our left. In a little, when she noticed us running, she began to run too. It was Biddy O'Hea. By the time we had got a little farther a car passed us, lashing and galloping, with the priest and the doctor in it, and there was a stream of people all along the road behind us; but I could see the old woman coming along at a kind of shuffling trot in front of them. It was wonderful how she kept up.

"In another couple of minutes we turned the corner—Dan and I had caught hold of the back of the car, and were running with

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it—and then we saw what had happened. Biddy O'Hea's cottage was in sight plain enough; O'Hanlon's would be hidden by the ground in any case; but there was a long brown scar down the hillside just above it. Dan shouted in my ear—we were all too excited to speak quietly—'The big rock's down on them.' And sure enough the boulder I had noticed sticking out was gone at last, as I suppose all the other boulders had gone century by century, down into the lowest level that the river course had scoured out.

"We crossed the bridge, still hanging to the car, and over the bank into the mountain, before the priest could get down; but the doctor, who was an active young chap, simply took a flying leap at the bank and was with us. The driver left the horse where he was, and ran too. But over the rough ground I couldn't keep up with Dan and the doctor, as they scrambled like goats among the heather, taking the angler's track along the river.

"There was a tearing great flood, of course, but nothing to account for washing out a house twenty feet up, till we got to

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the long pool. The water was back between the banks—it would generally be six or seven feet below them—but you could see it had been out till the gorge was filled like a bath. I could see nothing of O'Hanlon's house till I got right to the top of the last rise in the path, and there were Dan and the doctor looking down at it. The farther wall was standing and a bit of the near one, but the whole was heaped with clay and stuff. And right through the three gables of shed and cottage there was a monstrous savage gap, where the stone had bowled through as clean as a ball through a wicket. And there was the stone itself, fair in the throat of the stream at the very narrowest point. The water tore through in a sluice at each side of it, cutting in on the bank like a knife; while I was looking, a great piece of the far side fell with a plop.

"It was plain enough what had happened. A big rain-burst had detached the rock from its holding in the face of the hill; it had rolled down—and probably between the lash of the rain and the roar of the river at their doors the people in

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the house never even heard the sound of it. It had struck the wall and swept all before it; then lodging in the river-bed dammed up that terrible flood, and in a few seconds the whole place was a-wash. The little sort of lawn that the house stood in had been six or eight feet deep in water. Then the clay of the banks gave, and the river cut through, sucking out whatever floated, and tearing it along down to the sea. The whole place was as bare as your hand, only that about the walls of the house the loose earth that had been brought down with the falling stone was licked into smooth heaps. And when we came nearer we saw a man's boot sticking up through it.

"We fell to, tearing with our hands. But the clay was washed hard together. 'Where 'll we get spades?' I said. 'Go up, Dan, to Biddy O'Hea's, and bring one down,' said the priest. But you should have seen his face when he said it. Dan pretended not to hear him. Then the priest roared at him. 'Ah, sure, what use?' Dan said sulkily. I caught hold of him, saying, 'Come on, Dan.' He

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went then; but there was no getting him to hurry. I ran on by myself. When I got to the house the door was shut and locked. I knocked first, then I kicked. There was the woman sitting by the fire; she never lifted her head. Two frightened-looking girls had let me in. I said, 'Give me all the spades you have.' They brought me a spade and a slane for turf-cutting, and I ran back. Dan was outside. 'Was she in there?' he asked, with a face of terror. 'Yes,' I said — I was in no humour for talking — 'go on with these,' and I gave him the spades. He ran like a hare now, and I came on slower. By the time I got down there was a crowd about the place. When the clay was all turned over, they had got three bodies out, and a cat and two dogs and a pig. All O'Hanlon's live stock were out that evening, but nothing escaped that was under the roof. One man and a child were crushed right into the ground by the boulder. The man was Johnny O'Hanlon; and I saw big Neil M'Nelis, that he had wanted to fight, sobbing and crying over him, 'Och, Johnny O'Hanlon,

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is that where you are now? You that was standing up to me that bold this day, and me as big again as you. It was the foul blow you met, Johnny.' But little M'Cormick, the sharp-faced, red-headed little fellow, stood up there in the middle, and his eyes were as red as fire. 'Boys,' he said, 'the rest of them's gone down the river. Where's the bloody witch that done this, till we send her after them?'

"It's a horrible thing to say; but when I thought of that old woman sitting crouched there by the fire, as if she was gloating over the defeat of her enemies, the man's words seemed natural. There wasn't much time to think, though. The priest was standing there, a big, red-faced, coarse-looking man as you could see. He took a step over, and he caught M'Cormick by the throat, and shook him like a rat. 'Would you dare!' he said, 'ye bad Christian! Would you dare, then!' Then he threw the man from him, and he faced round, gathering the whole crowd in front of him with a sweep of his arm. Then he made the sign of the cross in air, and raised one hand.

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"'Go down on your knees, every one of you, and pray for the souls of them that God has cut off without warning in their sins.'

"It was the strangest thing I ever saw, the change in him from a red-faced bully into the shepherd of his people. The fashion of his countenance changed, as the Bible says. And he prayed there standing over the dead bodies, while the men knelt round him in the twilight—rolling out the Latin words, that neither I nor they understood, in his great Connaught brogue. Then he stopped and spoke to them again. 'Now you will say one more Paternoster for the help of a soul that is maybe in worse danger nor theirs, and in saying it you will pray humbly to Almighty God that He may not bring down upon your heads the fulfilment of your own evil desires. And you will leave to the judgment of God the one that invoked God's judgment.'

"He began again in the broad Latin, kneeling himself, and they said the prayer after him, sentence by sentence, kneeling there on the wet sod. Then he stood up and shook himself. 'Away with you down

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the river, boys, and search every eddy and back-water, and get nets and dredge the holes. There's ten bodies needing Christian burial, and that's the last good turn ever you'll do them.'

"They broke up in a minute. The priest watched them scatter, some going back to the bridge, some following down the bank. Then he turned up the hill to the woman's house. I know no more about it; but I couldn't understand the confidence with which he faced that job when he started up across the heather at a slow pace, with his eyes fixed on the ground, and reciting prayers to himself, for I could see his lips moving. I have often speculated since on the scene there must have been. However, as I said, I know nothing of what happened; except that Biddy O'Hea was always a pattern Christian from that day, and the neighbourhood regarded her with fear certainly, but with a kind of veneration. They were vastly civil to her, I need not tell you—and, what is more, to judge by what I heard since, they are rather proud of her as a local celebrity.

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"The bodies were all recovered—most of them in the tideway. But we worked at the river all that night. I couldn't help being grimly amused at the number of nets that were forthcoming in half an hour and the general handiness in working them, and the promptitude and skill that was displayed in getting out torches. I suppose there wasn't a man or boy but had burned the water times and again. I tell you a queer thing, though. There were over fifty salmon taken out that night as they were working the nets—for there had been a tremendous run of fish—but every one of them was put back.

"Oh no, it was no use to me; some other chaps did mighty well on the river before that flood had run down—one man got ten in a morning just above Dohoomiss. But I never threw a line. I didn't care to benefit by St. Brigid's dispensations."

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IV

WITH THE PILCHARD FLEET

Looe, during half the year, lives by pilchard, thrives by pilchard, speaks of pilchard, reeks of pilchard, thinks of pilchard, stinks of pilchard. In the forenoon the quays are very quiet: perhaps a few men at work on a small collier schooner that lies unloading; down at the ferry a group of watermen with their boats on the watch for seaside visitors who want a trip on the water, or a couple of hours' pollock-fishing. But the fishermen proper, who are the life and soul of Looe, keep the same hours as Fleet Street—or maybe a trifle later. Early in the afternoon a stir begins; hardy-looking bearded fellows, boys with young faces already weatherbeaten, come and go on the quays with the slow walk of sea-faring people; you see them drop quietly and without fuss into the small

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gigs heaped high with empty baskets, and slip gently down the river out to where the boats lie moored in a ring, two hundred yards, three hundred yards, off the pier-head. Unless, indeed, the night before has been a busy one; then the boats will be alongside the pier, and instead of row-boats you shall see, towards four or five in the afternoon, lugger after lugger slowly hoist its brown heavy sail and make down the narrow tideway, dropping easily with the ebb, or towed against the tide by a heavy rope from the pier in the same leisurely way. But in the night it is a very different story. However sound the sleep that sleepy Cornish air brings you, it is odds but one night you are wakened in the small hours by cries and bustling noises. Then if you go sleepily to your window, you see in the bright moonlight the whole quay on both sides lined with the luggers, and men in each of them busily stripping the shining pilchards out of the dark nets. They have "shot" a second time, and sooner than lose the tide, have hauled nets, fish and all, straight aboard, and run for home.

Only one set of creatures at Looe are

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busy for ever — the gulls. Morning and evening they are circling, soaring, plunging, or swimming over the narrow channel that divides East and West Looe; and whenever either Looe looks across from its windows at its rival over the water, there is always a white breast, grey wings, or a dove-coloured back seen in the foreground of the picture. For the fishermen, as they strip the nets, toss overboard the broken fish, and the bed of the river, as you see it in clear water, is dotted white with these leavings. Down there the dead fish wait till the crabs or eels have their will of them, but whatever drifts is the prey of the gulls; and there is always something adrift to keep the white and grey pack wheeling, screaming, chasing, and calling, and adding the last touch of the picturesque to the huddle of grey houses.

To the fisherman's instinct nothing fishy is alien, and I was naturally curious about pilchard. In Looe, as I have hinted, pilchard is in evidence: you see him everywhere, and you smell him—a strong oily smell—before you see him. Beyond these facts, I had ascertained that practically the

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whole take goes away to the Mediterranean —the bulk of it shipped to Genoa—and I had learnt from one of the greatest fish buyers on the coast that the pilchard is nothing more than a big sardine, and a sardine only a small pilchard. It was a proposition, however, that the Cornish fishermen could not bring themselves to accept: they were confident that in any possible mixture of pilchards and sardines they could pick out the pilchards. I had pushed my investigations as far as the curing-shed, where there is a big structure of concreted tanks—ten in all—each tank able to hold many thousands of pilchards. The process is simplicity itself. When a new tank is started the fish are pitched into the bottom, without any formality of cleaning, and a certain proportion of salt is thrown on them; next day more pilchards and more salt; and so on, the liquid which exudes from the fish making their own pickle, till at last the tank is brimming. There the fish are left until sufficient time has elapsed to pickle the latest lot; as for the under layers they are, *a fortiori*, sufficiently pickled. And the beauty of the process is that with

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it fish cannot spoil. You may leave them a year, or even two years, and they will not be over-cured; and therefore you need only barrel them as the demand comes in. Then you pack them in circular rows till the barrel is full, and put it under a screw-press, which brings the fish down perhaps a third of the way; then fill up again and press again, and so on till your barrel is packed tight and contains the regulation weight. And in the meanwhile the oil exuding from the staves is running into a tank and will fetch £3 a barrel in Bristol, where the finest of it makes castor-oil, and the dregs go into soap.

The shed in question was owned by an Italian firm, who have another establishment at Polperro, and the process represents an improvement on the old method of curing the fish on boards. The difference simply lies in this, that the fish in the vats can wait on the market; the fish cured in "baulks" must be sold or lost by a given time. Why did not the fishermen build vats of their own? I asked. None had the capital. Why did they not combine? There had been talk of that, but nothing came of it.

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As it stands, therefore, the great bulk of the fish that comes in is sold to a single firm, who have a practical monopoly and can make the price; for those who still cure their own fish are few, and even they, as has been shown, work at a heavy disadvantage. Here in Looe, as everywhere, the English are paying dear for their unwillingness to accept the principle of industrial co-operation.

Curing-sheds, however interesting to the amateur, are smelly places, and decidedly the real thing to see was the fishing itself. So I applied to the old boatman with whom I went "whiffing" for pollock and mackerel, and he presented me to the skipper of the boat in which he had worked for a matter of twenty years after his time in the navy. Your sergeant when he retires from the army does not find any great stock of active occupations; but your petty officer, with his pension of from sixteen shillings to a pound a week, can make a very pretty living when he settles down in a fishing port and draws another pay direct from the blue water.

Tide was dead low that day a little after

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noon, and the *Matilda* had been got down in the morning and was moored outside. The skipper arranged to pick me up at the ferry at four, and I retired to make provision. My landlady—a sailor's wife herself—said that Cornish pasties were the only fare for sea-going, and I (in my ignorance) laid in a flaskful of whisky.

At four, accordingly, the crew of three crossed over for me—the skipper, a man well up in years, who had followed his trade from boyhood; a pensioner of the naval reserve; and a good-looking young chap of seven-and-twenty, fair-haired and bearded, but showing that Jewish or Oriental type which is so common in Cornwall that one is constantly reminded there of the Phœnician strain, as of the Spanish on the coast of Connemara.

By five the jib and mizzen were set, the big lug hauled a-peak, and we were standing under a light northerly air eastward past Downderry towards Ram Head; and thirty or forty other brown-sailed boats were heading the same way.

It was a Monday, and Cornwall is a devout county; so neither Saturday nor

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Sunday night had the fleet been out, and they had therefore, more or less, lost touch of the pilchards. When we had run five or six miles down into the bay the leading boats were to be seen heading round, and our crew, who had all the time been debating chances together, now joined in a discussion, shouted from boat to boat, "Seen any sign?" One boat, it seemed, had seen a pilchard jump away in-shore to the west of us; but that was rather shoal water for a ten-ton lugger like ours. And so we cruised round and round, watching the other boats, watching the water for any sign, watching for the plunge of a gannet or even a gathering of the gulls, and watching the sun also for the time of shooting.

The theory of the thing is, that fish are most likely to go into a net just at the change of light; and accordingly you shoot just before sundown and haul with the first of the dark. If the moon is up, as she had been the week past, before sunset, that is bad; and as it was, her rising before the daylight was fully out of the sky did us no good.

Still, even under poorer conditions, the same boat had taken seventeen thousand fish

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the week before, and thirty thousand the week before that; and in the meantime, good or bad for fishing, it was about as lovely an evening as ever came out of the sky.

Grey and a little misty when we came out, it cleared overhead and on the horizon, as the breeze freshened. At first only the long slope of the cliffy hills towards Polperro could be seen; Polperro itself, in the haze of veiled sunlight, looked far distant. But half an hour before setting the sun blazed out in a wind-swept sky, and the long low line of the land running out past Mevagissey and Gorran Haven to the Deadman point—behind which lies Falmouth—was plain to see. It was just then we "shot," about a mile from the Downderry cliff, heading due south. The nets are stowed amidships in the space filled by the cabin in a small yacht; a cover of boarding lies over them. The first buoy was flung overboard, and there was a little discussion: should the net ride at the full depth—sixteen feet below the buoy? It was decided to shorten, as the water was shallowish, and as each buoy was tossed out a loop was tied

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on the connecting line. Each net is 120 yards long, and it rides from a line of buoys, sinking by its own weight. The buoys are fast to the head-rope, on which are set small corks, not large enough to float it, yet enough to make it lighter than the net itself, which hangs free below it. Before you shoot, every stitch of sail is taken off the boat—and in heavy weather the masts too are lowered, and baskets towed over the side to check the way—and then, over goes the first buoy out to starboard on the windward side, and float by float the long string, over half a mile of it, is slowly paid out.

All about us were boats dropping their peaks and starting for the slow drift; and behind them the sun was just going down into a bank of cloud, while the low line of green hills under him seemed one translucent mass of glorious golden olive, beyond the dazzle of the water. Then he plunged into the cloud bank, and the barred heap of vapour glowed as if molten; and over in the east beyond Ram Head the grey clouds caught a rosy flush. But the golden bank of hill grew solid and dark again, and more and more dark and solid, as the last of the

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sun's disc, clear for a moment above the hill-crest, sank out of sight. And the net was still paying out slowly, slowly, till it came to the last knot, and the young sailor spat on it—"There! good luck go with you," he said, as the drift-rope went overboard after it, given a clear thirty yards so that the net might fish out to the last corner.

There was nothing to do now but drift wherever the tide and breeze might choose to take us—nothing but to put a lamp amidships for a signal that we were a fishing-boat and unmanageable. A trawler out of Plymouth came up through the fleet, and excited the indignation of our crew, for instead of a side-light she carried one at the mast-head, which should signify that she also had her net shot and was out of control. She was going to shoot in-shore of us, along the sand, and the sight of her started one of those disquisitions on the whole race of trawlers that begin whenever fishermen are together. Here, as everywhere else, anathemas are heaped on the steam-trawler; hake and gurnet, fish that used to be had in thousands on this coast, are now hardly fished for, and all because the whole ground has

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been scratched and torn up and the spawn destroyed. So at least the naval reserve man stated it while we were rigging a couple of lines to fish for pollock.

This was a discouraging business at the outset, for the little chad (as they call the small sea-bream here) nibbled off bait after bait with impunity, until one, larger or rasher than the rest, took the hook in his mouth, and his tougher flesh made a more useful bait than the half-pickled pilchard. Presently a pollock came, but a small one, not two pounds' weight; and then the skipper took one line and I the other. One would say the hand-line fishing should put every one on a level, but the fact is that he hauled in nine or ten of the beautiful olive-brown fish, running about three pounds' weight, while I got barely one. If pollock were only as good as they looked,—or if they were cooked as an Italian of the Riviera would cook them,—what an excellent thing a pollock would be!

The moon was well up by now, making a silver shine over the sea, and all about us the lights were bobbing and twinkling on the grey water; and the skipper, even while he hauled in the pollock, had his mind on

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pilchard. We were hardly shot before there was sign, and no mistaking it. Suddenly from astern of us—but away on our lee, alas!—there arose a screaming of gulls. There they were, thick as bees, rising and settling, screaming and fighting, while at the noise grey wings came silently and swiftly flitting low over the water to join in the bickering and the spoil. The next net east of ours had struck a school; if the fish had been in number sufficient to carry the net down they would have headed for the bottom; but when the net is too strong for them to move it, they put their noses up, and the whole thing comes to the surface, while the greedy gulls peck and tear among the strugglers. As we watched, the water took a different colour, whitened and smoothed round the mass. That was the oil coming out of the pilchards, they told me. The cry subsided a little, then broke out in a new place farther east again—some one else had "knocked up." But round our net it was quiet enough. Still the fish were in the bay; that was proved, and by more senses than one. "I hear pilchard," said the skipper, as he swung his bait overboard. At first I

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could distinguish nothing, but gradually one's ear detected now and then, first on this side then on the other, the dabbling noise as a shoal rushed through the water on the top. But it would need a trained ear to swear to it, even on a night when the breeze was so light.

We left the lines to fish by themselves for a while and stepped forward into the cuddy for a cup of tea. The skipper praised my landlady's pasties, not without reason; they were something in the nature of beef-steak pie done up like a jam tart. About the whisky I said nothing, for I remembered that my boatman had looked a little hurt when I suggested beer to him, and had explained that he was a "staunch Rechabite." He did not smoke either, so he told me quite simply, "since he had found the Lord"; but he was quite prepared to admit that there were "good people that smoked," though in his own case he felt that it "made for condemnation." So I ventured to ask the skipper if he smoked. He had never touched tobacco nor any kind of spirits in his life. And the young man was the same. Very pleasant they were about it,

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too, quite free from any touch of bigotry; and certainly they might be taken round the country as patterns of what total abstinence may produce. The navy reserve man smoked, and I hinted to the skipper that perhaps he would not be averse to a glass of whisky. But the skipper said no—without consulting the pensioner, however—and I felt that my experience of boatmen was being entirely revolutionised.

Indeed, if it be not an impertinence to say so, these Cornish sea-going folk fill one with respect. Pleasant company as possible these three were to me—except, indeed, that they were inclined to treat a landsman as if he were a baby in long clothes who could scarcely be trusted to get into or out of a boat on his own feet; and, rough-looking people as they were, living the roughest of lives, there was not a rough word on their tongues. The navy reserve man made one little slip in speech—I regret to say that it was provoked by a mention of Mr. Leonard Courtney, who in those early days of the Boer war still represented that division of Cornwall in Parliament—and he was promptly called to order, and

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reduced to the nicest amenities of political discussion.

The nets would have been shot for an hour and a half when we began hauling. In this light weather three men manage the job readily enough, but in the fall of the year they carry a fourth hand, and they must want him. And, even of a fine night, put an average strong man—say a 'Varsity oar—to take his share of the hauling, and I think he would have enough of the unfamiliar strain. Once the drift-rope is in, one man stands by the tiller and hauls on the float-rope—this is the heavy work ; the others fetch the net in over the side, shake out the fish, and get the floats and the folds of net into their place, so that the whole may run out again like line off a reel.

As bad luck would have it, the net was only too light in fetching in. Plenty of it came aboard before we met a pilchard, and then it was only a stray fish ; after that they dribbled in, single fish sticking in the bottom of the net. Only just here and there did I see a panel of the net which gave me an idea of what a big catch might be ; for here the fish were stuck all over it in white bunches,

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and as the net lifted this white gleam showed through the silvery bubbles, whiter than they. But what astounded me was the length of the business. I took a spell at hauling when, as I supposed, we were about half-way through, and hauled single-handed for perhaps ten minutes, expecting every minute to find myself at the end—at any rate resolute to go on till I got there. But it was not till long after that that I heard we were through four of the eight nets, and even after a second spell of hauling along with the reserve man —it is light work for two—I doubt if I brought in more than two nets all told. It is a very different job from the short heavy lift on a trawl, ending with a desperate heave at the end when you land the bag of the net aboard and see all your take in a lump, tangled up with a mass of stone and seaweed. With the drift-nets it is a slow, steady labour, hauling, hauling, for an hour at the least, and probably, when the nets are full, two hours or even more. For no matter how quickly you handle them, it takes a second or so to wrench out the pilchard that is hanging by his gills without tearing him and to pitch him into the big basket or

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maund of plaited cane that stands beside you and fills slowly or rapidly as the case may be. There are stoppages, too, when the net has "rolled"—but a net well shot, as ours was, scarcely has a twist in it—and sometimes from other causes. "'Vast hauling, conger drill," I heard; and they explained to me how the extraordinary circular twist in the body of the net was made by a small conger that had attacked the caught pilchard and "drilled" up and up, trying to get it away, winding the meshes into what to you or me would have been a hopeless tangle, but, in their skilled hands, ravelled out in a moment.

If it was poor fishing, the consolation was that others were no better off. Light after light went out as the boats got under way—sure sign that there was little in their nets—and when our last float came in there were few vessels left on the ground. Only the couple of boats that had "knocked up" were still busy away to the east of us, and as we hoisted the lug and ran home we crossed a trail of buoys that showed another net not half in yet, and therefore presumably full.

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Two maunds—a miserable five hundred and a quarter—was all the shot brought us, and with the high bright moon there was no use to try another. In the dark, however, this is done by "bryming." All lights aboard are put out, and a man stands on the bows and stamps heavily every moment or two. The shock on the water scares the pilchards, if they are there; and even through the night the flash of their silver bellies shows as they turn and scud.

It was pleasant on the water, but pleasant also to be getting in. The breeze that had held steady all evening died, after the manner of breezes, and left us half a mile out, with a strong ebb running down the river. All the boats were brought up in a huddle together, exchanging chaff and questions, and putting out sweeps to get to their moorings. It was close on midnight—and the skipper told me the time to within a quarter of an hour by the position of the pointers and the pole-star—before we got in. I was landed on the west of the water on some rocks, but at the full ebb of spring tides the boat could not reach the pier steps in East Looe, and the youngest of the crew had put

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his high boots on to give a back to the other two through twenty yards of water. I stayed to watch the result, for the skipper was a solid lift, but when I got to my coign of vantage above the river-mouth, persons could not be distinguished. All I saw was a pack of boats and dark figures moving in the pale moonlight, and all I heard was a babel of cheerful voices. It is an easy trade under those conditions of weather, but a chancy one. Our night's take was not worth five shillings. But with luck it might easily have been ten thousand fish—which really means more than twelve; for you count by the "long hundred" of six score, and give a "lass" in on the lot of ten thousand. And pilchards are worth at present 8s. a thousand on the quay. Divide that into six shares, set three to the share of the boat, and give each man one-sixth for himself. It came in good weeks to £2, in fair ones to 25s.; but a man working at it week in and week out does not average £1 a week, they say—the wage of a farm labourer or little better, and earned at a far more dangerous trade. But a trade of infinite variety and excitement, one would think, with the touch of gambling always

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present, beyond the death hazard; and I would sooner earn a pound a week as a fisherman than three times that money groping and sweating in a mine.

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V

MY FRIEND THE SALMON POACHER

RESPONSIBILITY is one of those feelings which vary inversely as the distance. When a friend of my friends decided, more or less on my recommendation, to take a river in Connaught, I felt little personal concern; when I heard that the best cook in County Mayo was coming to him for a pound a month, I only laughed. But when events so fell out that I was to be for the first week of his tenancy his guest, and his only guest; that I was to accompany him to this region full of unknown quantities, including an Irish lodge and an Irish cook; then, I must say, responsibility sat very close to my heart. An unknown salmon river is always admittedly a toss-up; but in such matters as comfort and cleanliness the unknown still presents awful possibilities in the West of

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Ireland. And the place to which we were going lay in the very most out-of-the-way and unknown of all regions between the Bloody Foreland and Bantry Bay. I shall call the place Barmouth; and our letters from there were dated "Barmouth at the Back of Beyond." Its real name was, like Barmouth, one devoid to the stranger of any alarming associations; but that it carried such associations to those who knew it, we had early warning.

My friend and I met at Broadstone, the terminus of the Midland and Great Western Railway, and immediately plunged deep in discussion of water, flies, and so forth. Our talk was interrupted by a quiet gentleman in the corner of the carriage, also equipped for fishing. "Excuse me," he said, "but I heard you say you were going to Barmouth. Do you quite realise what you are in for?" Then followed lurid details as to the hotel. We explained that we were going to a lodge, but the explanation obviously did not reassure him. My friend and I concealed our apprehensions from each other, and the journey passed pleasantly enough, till we reached our

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station on the shore of Clew Bay, sent on our traps by car for the twenty-mile drive, and proceeded to the hotel to lunch before following on bicycles. There I was greeted by acquaintances among a party seated by the window, and I mentioned my destination, which was unknown to them as to me. But just as we were preparing to start in the good spirits which an excellent lunch had generated, another blow descended. An elderly gentleman from the party in the window came up to me, and, naming my name, explained that he knew my father, that he heard we were going to Barmouth, and that he wished to warn me. "Lock your doors at night," he said, "or they will put in drunk drovers to sleep along with you. You'll be lucky if they don't stable donkeys there as well." I gave up the hotel and mentioned the lodge. "Lodge!" he said. "Well, there *may* be a lodge." (It was plain he disputed its existence.) "But anyhow Barmouth is the most God-forsaken spot in Ireland, and if you'll be advised by me, you'll take the next train back to Dublin."

Here were encouraging omens to greet my friend at his first coming to Ireland;

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and still worse for me, who felt by this time responsible with a vengeance. We crept out dejectedly; and the infernal nature of things manifested itself more and more. At the first turning, before we had ridden fifty yards, a strolling pig of large size charged and nearly upset us both. What was the use of telling a stranger that such a thing had never happened to me before? He plainly foresaw twenty animated miles of pig-dodging. For a little way we went along by the sea, and cried out for pleasure at the familiar sights and sounds and smells of a land between the heather and the tide; for my friend (thank heaven!), though new to Ireland, was not English. But the grey clouds fell lower, and the long straight road over moorland grew longer, and the wind blew continually and with increasing power in our faces. There was a momentary excitement when we crossed a small river plainly in fishing order, but that soon subsided, and at the end of ten miles we were dead beat.

At the half-way house dwelt, so we were told, the clerk to the Conservators, and as we were going to him for a salmon

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license, we decided also to try for a car. A very clean, prosperous-looking half-way house it was, public-house, post-office, shop, and so forth, all in one. Outside the door was a regular stud of bicycles, and with them two or three young men who proved to be dispensary doctors, one from Barmouth. I shall never forget that interview. We were tired certainly, but the rivers were in fair flood, and we still hoped to be in time to kill a fish before dinner. The doctors, representing local information, were unanimous that we might as well fish in a field. The conversation ended by a sporting offer to lay a bottle of champagne that we would not kill two fish in the month. Also, we learnt for the first time that our lodge had stood empty for six years. They were hospitable, friendly people, but they were depressing beyond all words; and we started in the lowest spirits for that drive of ten miles over the bleakest moor I have ever seen, cuddling bony bicycles on our knees.

It was falling dark before we sighted Barmouth, and I was feeling like a criminal as we drove over a bridge and looked ruefully at the discredited river; thence past the

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